

Choosing a Good Assisted Living Residence:

A Consumer's Checklist

When you are considering an assisted living residence for yourself or a loved one, you want to find one that is a bright, comfortable, and inviting place to live. You want a home that provides a variety of stimulating activities and has a history of providing good care to residents. Most assisted living residences work with third party providers to provide additional services such as hospice, home health, and therapy services. Some allow for short-term respite stays and offer adult day care. Many provide specialized care for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia, and others also have nursing home care within the same campus.

Getting started

- Contact your local Area Agency on Aging for local ombudsman for information. An ombudsman is an advocate for assisted living residents and a resource for consumers. The ombudsman will provide free information on the facilities, including strengths, and special services, and patterns of complaints received by the ombudsman office. For contact information go to www.idahoaging.com
- Obtain a list of facilities in your desired location from the local Ombudsman Program. From that list, select three or four facilities that are in your desired location. It is important to choose a location that is close to those who will regularly visit the resident.
- View the survey results for each facility on the Licensing and Certification website at www.assistedliving.dhw.idaho.gov
- Assisted living residences range in size from three beds to 148 beds. Consider which environment would be most preferred by the future resident.
- Call the residences you are most interested in. Find out if they have any openings, if they have an age requirement, if they serve a special population, and whether or not they offer the level of care required by the future resident. (*Care levels vary greatly from residence to residence, so it is important to ask.*) If necessary, find out if they are handicap accessible and/or accept Medicaid. Don't wear yourself out visiting facilities that do not have openings, don't offer the services that you need or are out of your price range.
- Make an appointment to visit one of more of the assisted living residences that meet your requirements. The facility should be willing to show you around any time, but we suggest you make an appointment the first time. If you like a facility, make a second unannounced visit, preferably at a different time of day – such as a weekend or during an evening meal.

Some general things to look for in a residence

- Is the residence clean? Use your senses – does it look clean? Is there an odor (*odors should not be persistent or pervasive*)?
- Ask to be shown a resident room (*with resident permission*). Is the room clean, comfortable and home-like?
- Get permission to view a resident bathroom (*either in the room or a common bathroom*). Is there space for toiletries and personal items? Are they stored appropriately? Does it have grab bars and an easily accessible shower? Are clean towels and washcloths available?
- Do residents have easy access to a private telephone in a quiet place?
- Can you easily find posted instructions on how to contact the ombudsman, Licensing and Certification, and Adult Protective Services (*if applicable*)?
- Are areas available for private visits with friends and/or family? Is there an area for private dining?

Observe and talk with the residents

- Are the residents clean and well groomed?
- Are the residents up and active during the day? Are they engaged in activities or interacting with people in common areas? Is there an activities calendar posted? Does the activities calendar reflect what they are doing?
- Visit with the residents. Ask them how they like the residence, if they like the food, if they feel well cared for, and if they have enough to do. Tell them that you are thinking about bringing someone to live there and ask if they would recommend the residence for others.

Mealtime observations

- Look in the dining areas during a meal. Are residents who need help being assisted in eating? Are adaptive devices, such as special utensils and dishes, used when appropriate?
- Are people served their meals promptly?

- Do the menus posted reflect what the residents are eating?

Pay attention to the staff and service provided

- Observe the interaction between the residents and staff. Does staff seem to respect and enjoy the residents? Do residents seem to respond well to the staff?
- How do staff members address the residents? It is usually not appropriate to address adults as “honey” or “sweetie.” Some residents like to be called by their first name; others prefer the formality of Mr. or Mrs. Staff should know their residents and how they prefer to be addressed.
- Do staff members respect the resident's privacy? Do they knock at the resident's door and wait for a response before entering?
- Are requests for assistance responded to within a few minutes? All facilities are required to have a call system. Watch to see how quickly calls are responded to.
- Do staff members look calm, well organized and attentive to the residents?
- Ask about staff training. What training requirements does the residence have? How much training does staff receive? Who does the training?
- Do staff members acknowledge your presence? If you are visiting without a tour guide, someone should tactfully inquire about your presence at the residence.

Become informed about the facility's management and administration

- First and foremost, find out if the facility is licensed by the State of Idaho. Any facility providing care to three or more unrelated adults should be licensed by the state.
- If they are licensed, read the results of the most recent survey conducted by the state. This report provides details of any deficient practice found during the annual licensing inspection conducted by Licensing and Certification.
- Find out how long the current administrator has been there. If less than one year, ask how long the previous administrator was employed. Frequent changes in administration can affect continuity of care.
- Find out who owns the assisted living residence and if there is a management company that is involved. Ask if there are other residences this person or company operates in the region. You may want to review the surveys for these residences as well to see if the person or company consistently provides good care. Surveys and complaints against assisted living residences are available for public viewing at www.assistedliving.dhw.idaho.gov
- Ask how complaints are addressed and how problems are resolved. Find out which staff person has been designated as the person to handle grievances.

Understand the payment system of the facility

- Prices will vary from residence to residence. Some accept Medicaid as a payment option (*for eligibility contact your Regional Medicaid Unit*) or visit www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/site/4046/default.aspx
- If the residence accepts Medicaid and the prospective resident qualifies for Medicaid, the resident will pay a fixed amount each month.
- Be sure to ask about any additional charges. Facilities may charge Medicaid recipients extra for a private room or bathroom as long as the charge applies to private pay residents as well. Facilities are not allowed to charge Medicaid recipients extra for care and services that are paid for by Medicaid.
- If the residence is strictly private pay, ask about their billing procedures and payment system. Some facilities offer various packages of services for different rates. Others conduct an assessment to determine what level of care is required and charge a specified rate for each level. Facilities with billing systems that are overly complex, unclear or not easily understood should be avoided.

Reference:

“The Ombudsman Guide to Choosing a Good Assisted Living Residence – A Consumers Checklist, Denver Regional Council of Governments